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*KNIGHTS OF TOIL*  
By N. H. J. BAIRD, R. O. I.

*Courtesy Carroll Gallery, London*

## Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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THE other day leaving the throng of Piccadilly, and passing beneath the lofty portals of Burlington House into its spacious quadrangle, where despite the world-shaking clash of arms, there was drawn up a numerous array of the automobiles and carriages of the visitors to the Royal Academy Exhibition, my mind by some chance suggestion reverted to the story of the humble origin of this imposing pile, and of the great and powerful institution which it shelters. For those people deceive themselves, who think that the Royal Academy has ceased to represent corporately British art. The successive revolts, and the assaults made upon it from time to time in its career, by discontented extremists of various schools and movements, culminating at the present day, in the unscrupulous hostility of a notorious clique of press-critics, out for copy and

self-advertisement, have only served to emphasize the strength of its position. It still draws into its galleries visitors on a national scale, and more than ever continues to attract and enroll in its ranks, the artistic talent and genius, with but few exceptions, of the Anglo-Saxon race, and this even from beyond the boundaries of the Empire. Singleton Copley and Benjamin West began in the days of Sir Joshua Reynolds that connection with the United States, which John Singer Sargent so brilliantly maintains to-day.

Let us contrast the palatial home of the Academy, its tens of thousands of visitors, the official and social status accorded to it with a house in a court off St. Martin's Lane, Seven Dials, London, a neighborhood even then well on its way to its present notoriety for squalor and poverty, where in one of its rooms, dimly lighted by tallow



A SHADY STREAM WITH CATTLE AND STORMY SKY  
By WILLEM MARIS

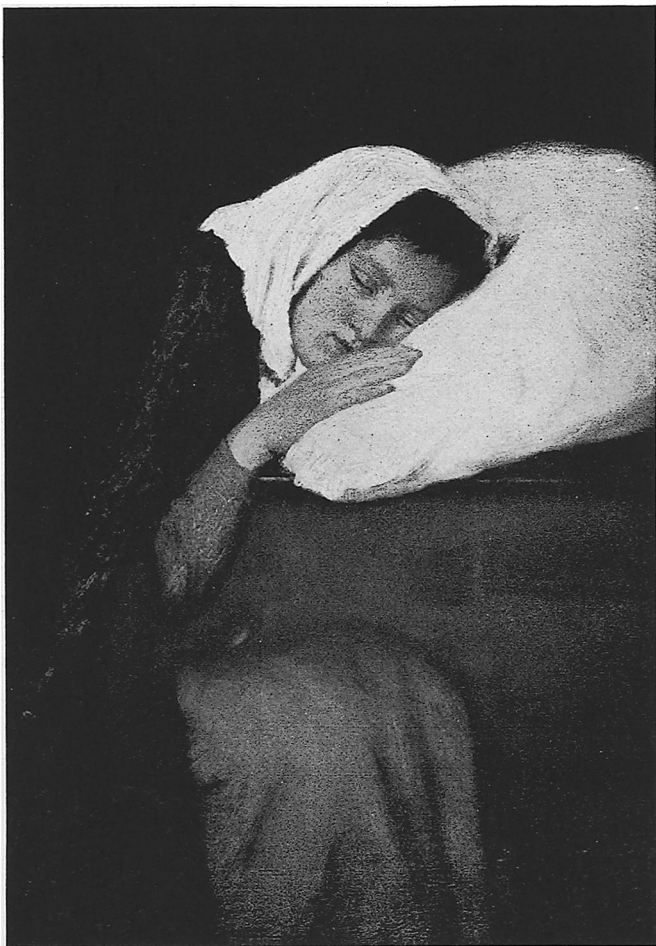
*Courtesy Carroll Gallery, London*

candles, a group of men sat one evening a hundred and seventy-eight years ago, and discussed over pipe and tankard, a project of one of their number. This scheme would, he promised, put them and their profession on a proper footing in the community. "It was quite time" he argued "that they should cease to be regarded as belonging to the "same category as 'strolling players,' 'gipsies, tinkers and others,' " at that time defined to be, in the eyes of the law "rogues and vagabonds." The ambitious formulator of this project for their corporate and individual betterment, was a sturdy, hearty, looking gentleman of plain but resolute appearance, known to the London world of his day as "Will Hogarth" and to the wide world for all time since, and to come, as "Hogarth," he needs no second name to

distinguish him. Now this modest little gathering was the beginning of the English Royal Academy, whose importance and influence in the world of art we have been briefly considering. Our friends of St. Peters Court, St. Martin's Lane, appear to have taken things very leisurely, as indeed was the comfortable way in the year of grace 1739, when this memorable gathering took place; they called themselves the "Incorporated Artists" an effort which apparently contented them till the year 1760, twenty-one years afterwards, when the society celebrated its coming-of-age by holding an exhibition at the still existing rooms of the "Society of Arts" Adelphi, Strand. After this there arose dissension in their ranks, secessions and general trouble, which ultimately issued in the foundation of the

Royal Academy, more or less in its present form, and with Sir Joshua Reynolds as the president. Its institution was considered to be an event of such national importance that King George III marked his sense of it, by conferring a knighthood on its first president. The following presidents did not receive the knightly accolade, but since 1820, beginning with Sir Thomas Laurence's tenure, a knighthood has always gone with the office. In the instance of Lord Leighton a peerage was granted.

If plain "Will Hogarth" could revisit his nursling in its 20th century home, in what plain and hearty vernacular would not his astonishment and satisfaction be expressed at the incredible transformation and growth from his modest meeting in St. Peters Court, Seven Dials, and their first and long delayed little display in that quiet old-world street behind the Strand to this 147th Exhibition of over 2,000 works, in the noble building in Piccadilly; its great courtyard pulsing with the throbbing glittering of automobiles and carriages, as they convey in and out the stream of visitors. It is not a moot point, however, whether his satisfaction or approval would be correspondingly great when he came to contemplate certain of the pictures so palatially housed. He was in his own day considered an arch-rebel against artistic authority, and the accepted canons of his time, but some of the modernities, which evading the conservatism of the academy have found place in the exhibition of late years would, I think, evoke from him some very definite criti-



CONVALESCENCE  
By D. A. C. ARTZ

*Courtesy John A. Machray, Esq.*

cisms, couched in emphatic and unvarnished Saxon. What would he have thought and said about that incomprehensible jumble of allegory and realism, of which that quite sincere artist George Clausen has delivered himself, and exhibited under the title of "Renaissance." It is supposed to signify the revival or the hope for the revival and renaissance of Belgium. Language and phrase fail me to describe my bewilderment in presence of such a conception, its only virtue is its evident sincerity. The devastation of Belgium is denoted by some upstanding relics of masonry, formal and unreal. They would be



*GIRL KNITTING*  
By B. J. BLOMMERS

*Courtesy Carroll Gallery, London*

indifferent work from a scene-painter's brush. Also some fallen masonry in the foreground amongst which is disposed in more or less prostrate attitudes of grief and abandonment several figures, the most prominent being the figure of an elderly man in a pronouncedly modern but strangely incongruous frock coat, etc. Stiff and archaic in drawing as this figure is, it is conceived with much sincerity and even dignity: spring flowers in the Botticelli style strew the foreground, whilst funny formally arranged white clouds decorate a sky of a singularly cold, grey, unsympathetic blue, indeed the whole picture is permeated by a hard, bright, high pitched, grey tone, which is carried into the flesh tones of the figure, that forms the crux of a design,

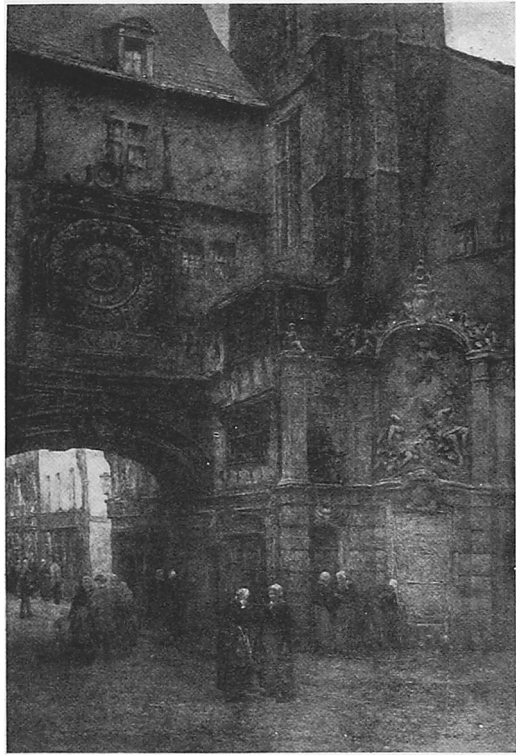
enigmatical enough already. A nude figure of a young girl stands upright in the center of the canvas with one arm held high and pointing heavenwards, the head turned and slightly inclined towards the figures on the ground, who, to do them justice, are studiously ignoring the charms of this very ingenue damsel. One can only imagine that the artist is quite devoid of any sense of things; the plumping down of this nudity amongst modern men and women in their ordinary clothes realistically rendered, suggests nothing but the plain question "How the Devil comes she there?" There is little to suggest that it is an allegory, none of the irresponsible feeling of Charles Sims or La Touche's phantasies in which intrusion of the nude into real life, amidst the glittering foliage of gardens and the spray and iridescence of splashing fountains seem almost natural; on the contrary it is all hard and grim and very much in earnest, even the damsel herself is built on such very ascetic lines that their display seems all the more uncalled for. Allegory is not Clausen's forte, nor yet a sense of humor which would have prevented the perpetration of such a medley.

Like the work we have been considering, Edward Stott's picture "The Entombment" is a serious and earnest effort, but marred in the same way by a flavor of grotesqueness of which of course he is quite unconscious. The figure at the shoulder bearing the body of the Christ is so utterly lacking in dignity of movement and pose and even type that it would take its place excellently in any humorous subject selected for example from Don Quixote.

The primitives and the painters of the renaissance are frequently quaint and fanciful in the way in which they introduce the nude or the supernatural into scenes of contemporary life, and their poses and attitudes are often archaic and stiff, but they never offend by any sense of unnatural or absurd incongruity or by such unmeaning figures as Clausen's nude girl.

Turning to Sargent's work I do not consider that the great American is quite so interesting as usual in the work he exhibits this year. The sketch or picture "Master and Pupils" is miraculous in its management of an impossible subject and effect, which have been selected with a perverse ingenuity and eye for difficulties; a tangled forest interior, sunlight breaking through in irregular pictorially ineffective glints, middle foreground a woodland bank running across the picture, immediate foreground rocky bed of water-course its tone broken up by a blazing patch of sunlight. Beyond the bank and truncated by it, are the figures of an artist at work and some children, pictorially quite valueless, the picture is a miracle of skill and power and nothing else. In his return to portraiture Sargent has not as yet regained his former level. His portrait of the librarian to the University of Cambridge is distinguished in color, which his Lord Curzon of Kedleston is not, but it has little of his nerve and swing of brush. His "Tyrolean Crucifix" and "The Mountain Grave Yard" have splendid passages, but as pictorial selections they are just freaks.

The large oil picture by N. H. J. Baird, which was exhibited in the Royal Academy of last year, has a point of interest outside its scope as a work of art. These lusty young yeomen returning astride their teams after the day's labors, no longer incarnate in modern genre the Elgin Marbles—the dreams of Phidias or Praxiteles they, and indeed the very horses which they ride, have exchanged the good red soil of Devon for the incarnadined fields of Flanders and of France. Patriotism runs high in the West now, as in the days of Frobisher and Drake, and the countryside no longer resounds with the voices and the laughter of its sons in their youth. The lads have gone to the war in troops and companies without stint, in the small historic town of Bideford alone 500 men have gone—the heart quickens at the thought of it. Baird's paint-



LA GROSSE HORLOGE COTE DE  
LA FONTAINE ROUEN By JULES LESSORE  
Courtesy Carroll Gallery, London

ing which is entitled "Knights of Toil" has no living parallel in England to-day. Painted before even the first mutterings of the storm were heard, the fanciful may see in the pose and movements of the horses and their riders, a faint prophetic hint of the charge and plunge of battle.

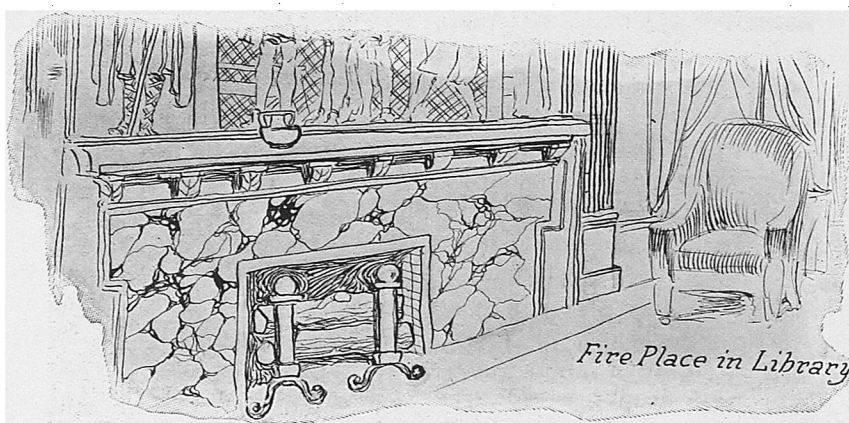
"La Grosse Horloge, Rouen," the subject of the noble picture by Jules Lessoré, here reproduced, interests us also in relation to the war. As we contemplate this wonderful instance of mediaeval artistry and craftsmanship our thoughts revert at once to its brethren—once its rivals for loveliness—the Cloth Hall of Ypres, the Cathedral at Rheims, the ruined glories of Louvain and Malines, the imperilled treasures of Bruges and Ghent, and we sicken with sorrow and apprehension.

The little gem of "genre" by Blommers

"Girl Knitting" is a glimpse of lowly Dutch life, idyllic in its peace and simplicity, but it also, none the less, may yet feel the full horror of war's ravage. Another little picture "Convalescence" by a celebrated Dutch artist—D. A. C. Artz—is in keeping with the spirit of the hour. In spite of its title, sadness is the dominant note of this exquisite little picture. Excellent as the reproduction is, it does not do justice to the subtlety of the drawing and painting of the head and hand as I remember it at the Carroll gallery last year, the coloring also being of extraordinary beauty and refinement. All these pictures including the fine William Maris—the reproduction hardly gives the dramatic power of the sky—have gone to, or are destined for American and Canadian collections. What a steady stream

of the cream of European art now flows westward!

Reverting finally to the Royal Academy, the outstanding feature of the sculpture is the Belgian Egide Mombeaux's marble statue called "Premier Matin." The title is not very illuminating, but the work will rank high indeed among modern sculpture. A life size nude figure of a woman sits leaning forward, the face shaded by her hand and arm; she is cast in heroic mould, heavy, even muscular, but at the same time is somewhat spare; this sparseness in some subtle way gives dignity and grandeur to her nakedness, and the whole conception strangely reminds one of Michael Angelo, what the figure exactly signifies I don't know; it is a noble "song without words" in marble. I am glad to hear that it is to be acquired for the nation.



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